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# Fertility, Contraception, and Abortion and the Partnership of Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin

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FERTILITY, CONTRACEPTION, AND ABORTION  
AND THE PARTNERSHIP OF HENRY MILLER AND ANAÏS NIN

by

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## ABSTRACT

During their creative and sexual relationship, Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller together shaped their identities as artists. When they met, both were married and had tried writing before, but their partnership pushed them into a new kind of life in which writing took precedence. During this process, they described their relationship as literarily fertile; a few years later, Nin actually became pregnant with Miller's child and decided to have an abortion. In Nin's diary, metaphor and reality overlap as she anxiously makes sense of her decision that is informed by her belief that an artist cannot be a mother. In his novels, Miller discusses abortion with a casualness undercut by a conflict between morality and necessity.

By looking into passages produced during this time in Nin's and Miller's relationship that concern fertility, contraception, and abortion, this thesis aims to gain understanding of how Nin and Miller shaped their identities as artists, particularly in terms of how artistic creation and procreation interact in the life of an artist. Furthermore, this thesis explores the relationship between Nin's and Miller's fertility metaphors and the reality of Nin's abortion and concludes that their bodily metaphors often serve to shift responsibility for difficult decisions onto cosmic forces, a mechanism that indicates a nervousness about the interaction between human choice and divine plan.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

It is not surprising to find that the pair of autobiographers infamous for candid portrayals of their sexuality also has a fondness for bringing up birth, contraception, and abortion. Lovers and literary partners from 1931 through the early 40s, Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller both made careers out of converting their lives into writing, searching their pasts and presents for patterns and experiences that could be transposed into symbols and metaphors. In Nin's diaries and Miller's novels written during the beginning of their sexual and creative partnership, their portrayals of literary fertility quickly become entangled with their discussions of the literal consequences of sex.

The highly personal nature of both authors' writing allows the opportunity to analyze their creativity metaphors in light of their unique relationship. Nin's entries about her relationship with Miller and about her graphic abortion of his child are steeped in symbolism related to her grappling with the archetypes of "mother," "father," "child," and "artist." Miller's respect for Nin's privacy (her clandestine affairs, including that with Miller, rendered the complete details of her life unpublishable until the death of her husband) prevented him from writing about what was perhaps the most important relationship of his life, but in his major autobiographies of the time (*Tropic of*

*Cancer, Black Spring, Tropic of Capricorn, and Sexus*), there are more than a handful of passages, both literal and metaphoric, that give insight into his definition of the relationship between artistic creation and parental procreation, or the prevention thereof.

In the introduction to their book *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron ask,

[If] the dominant belief about art and literature is that they are produced by solitary individuals, but the dominant social structures are concerned with familial, matrimonial, and heterosexual arrangements, how do two creative people escape or not the constraints of this framework and construct an alternative story? (Chadwick and de Courtivron 7)

Digging into Nin's and Miller's construction of their "alternative story" is a central part of this thesis. But rather than telling their story, which Noël Riley Fitch does beautifully in her chapter of Chadwick and de Courtivron's book, and which Lynette Felber interprets less romantically in her book *Literary Liaisons*, I aim to look to both writers' language to analyze the metaphors they used, together and individually, to make sense of their story. Since both Nin and Miller often write about their identification as artists, the interaction of their perceptions of the role of the archetypal artist and the roles of men and women, particularly those of mother and father, husband and wife, are ripe for discussion.

The novelty of their situation provides rich material in their letters and autobiographical writing for the consideration of how they set up their new roles for themselves in their relationship. Both Nin and Miller sought "alternative" or experimental relationships throughout their lives and thrived on interaction with



the opposite sex. Nin constantly overlapped her relationships with different men to the point that she occasionally slept with three or four lovers in one day. In her later years, she had a husband on the East coast (Hugh Guiler) and a husband on the West coast (Rupert Pole). The cunning required to keep these relationships going became the subject matter for her diaries and for some of her fictionalized writing, such as *A Spy in the House of Love*. She struggled with the question of whether a female artist should have children and ended up undergoing several abortions to remain childless. Though she clearly rejected many traditional elements of marriage, her marriage to Guiler served as her secure home base and lasted until her death. Miller married five women (and considered it with least three more) who were all creative in some way but who still met at least some domestic expectations of traditional wifedom. He abandoned his first wife (Beatrice Wickens) and child because he could not tolerate fulfilling the duties of the gainfully employed middle-class husband. His second marriage, to June Mansfield, collapsed in jealousy and melodrama, but her willingness to support him financially allowed him to try out writing. Nin's husband and Miller's first two wives all had artistic inclinations of their own, but none of them supplied the artistic pollination of Nin's and Miller's partnership, which was what pushed both into a confident, highly productive mode in which their writing became the most important part of their lives. For Nin, her relationship with Miller was her first real extramarital affair. He convinced her to take herself seriously as an artist. For Miller, Nin was the woman he had been seeking who was his equal in sensuality and in writing with whom he could "afford to be frank" (*Literate Passion* 42).

Readers of Henry Miller's first and most famous book, *Tropic of Cancer* (published 1934), will remember the third-trimester announcement of his metaphoric pregnancy in the raucous opening section:

[The] book has begun to grow inside me. I am carrying it around with me everywhere. I walk through the streets big with child and the cops escort me across the street. Women get up to offer me their seats. Nobody pushes me rudely any more. I am pregnant. I waddle awkwardly, my big stomach pressed against the weight of the world. (*Cancer* 27)

Those familiar with the letters of Miller and Nin and of Nin's diaries know that she is, effectively, the "father" of *Tropic of Cancer*. Paris also figures prominently in the novel as a womb-like space that nurtures and supports Miller so he can be reborn as an artist. America, as Miller sees it, is by contrast a land of lifeless wage slaves who view artists with suspicion. *Tropic of Capricorn* (published 1939) bears the unusual subtitle, "On the Ovarian Trolley," and in Paul R. Jackson's interpretation, describes his first, "incomplete" (Jackson 39) artistic gestation in America. In *Sexus*, which is essentially a retelling of *Tropic of Capricorn*, "descent into the womb of life becomes the central metaphor for the autobiographical myth he imposes on his life" (Jackson 39). His life experiences prior to his move to Paris serve as fodder for his gestation, and *The Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy (*Sexus*, *Plexus*, *Nexus*) almost provides a list of ingredients that go into the creation of an artist and implies that there is a cosmic womb that supplied these ingredients to ensure that Miller became an artist. In all three books, the system seems to be that once he is reborn as a writer, he can in turn give birth to books.

These books are known better, however, for their sexual content than for their womb imagery. The physical relationship between sex and fertility is obvious, and on one level this relationship is exactly what Miller wants to evoke. For him, his infamous graphic descriptions of body parts and their actions are not just in the spirit of "épater la bourgeoisie." Though he does relish the opportunity to shock, the recurring themes of artistic rebirth and creative fertility found in Miller's work and correspondence with Nin bring to light the other purpose of his inclusion of dozens of sex scenes. In the Miller worldview, a kind of Zen optimistic naturalism in which one should not be afraid to look life square in the face and enjoy what one sees; whores, insanity, poverty—these are as essential to life as romance and good food and deserve equal space on the page. The Victorian insistence of Miller's parents (especially his mother) on earning an honest living and the respect of the neighbors, regardless of one's real desires, eventually came to indicate for him a denial of life that led Americans to be "dead in life:" following the prescribed steps and denying their human instincts to enjoy life. Unlike most of his contemporaries of the naturalist and modernist epochs, Miller was optimistic about finding a real solution, and his major works form a multi-volume autobiography that tells of how he took responsibility for his own happiness, took advantage of his freedom, and accepted the "flow" of life. If the comforts of the intractable social, economic, and political machine must be sacrificed, then so be it, says Miller.

A percentage of Miller's thousands of pages do focus especially on sex in large part because he thought his predecessors did not do it justice. As Norman Mailer puts it, "Miller saw that Lawrence had come to grips with the poetry of

sex but none of the sewer gas" (*Genius and Lust* xii). Subsequently, he probably continued to talk about sex to live up to his reputation, but he did genuinely think of sex as a type of nourishment for life along with thoroughly enjoyed meals and conversations, appreciation of art, and long walks. But sex alone (food comes in second place) is particularly apt to connect metaphorically with the most appropriate symbols of life: fertility, pregnancy, and birth. Put succinctly, Miller's penchant for womb metaphors and sex scenes fit together in the message of his works in the same way that the sculptures of some cultures depict giant phalluses or pregnant bellies in celebration of fertility and, by extension, life. Abortion and birth control, too, appear close on the page to the sexual instinctivism Miller espoused, but they seem to stanch the flow of life so central to Miller's artistic vision.

For both Miller and Anaïs Nin, sex was a preferred topic, and therefore their sex lives served as fuel for their writing, as can be seen in Nin's recording of the development of their relationship in her diary. Both Miller and Nin consider themselves to have fertilized and nourished each other so that they could give birth not only to their respective works but also to their artist selves. In short, each saw him- or herself as the mother of his or her own creative work, "fecundated," as Nin puts it, by the other. That they were sexual and creative partners who made their debuts as writers during their relationship made this symbolism particularly fitting. At the same time that they were writing their first important works, built on mutual inspiration and encouragement, they were inventing their identities as artists and working out what behaviors and roles fit into these identities.

Nin, too, frequented fertility metaphors in her diary, which, like Miller's books, is known for its sexual content. In her unexpurgated diaries now known as *Henry & June* and *Incest*, she recorded her experimentation with Miller's sex equals life philosophy and found that her affairs cured her of her "restlessness" (*H&J* 60) and inspired her to write. In her new life as "the artist," "the mother," "the mistress," and "the wife" (literally to Guiler and metaphorically to Miller), she ran into some difficulty figuring out how to practice Miller's ideas as a woman. Nin's tendency to see the artist as a role that must interact with the roles of mother, mistress, and wife is a sign of her struggle to create a nontraditional role for herself by recycling and rearranging some elements of the old templates. The way their relationship merged creativity and sexuality highlighted that they were of opposite sex and thus led her to attempt to define herself as the woman artist that complimented him as the male artist. In doing so, she picked out elements of women's traditional roles and questioned whether or not they worked with her new identity.

For Nin, fertility metaphors turned surprisingly real when she became pregnant with Miller's child in 1934. Her attempt to make sense of the overlapping literal and metaphoric fertility is fascinating. Miller had walked away from family life in the past, and while he had been metaphorically "pregnant," Nin's literal pregnancy presented an especial challenge for her in reconciling being a woman and a freewheeling artist. When her traumatic abortion occurred on the same day that *Tropic of Cancer* went to press, she tried to

understand the coincidence along the same metaphoric lines that she and Miller had been using for years.

The comparison of the artistic process to procreation is not unique in cultural history, and neither is the reciprocal inspiration between lovers who were also artistic partners. Scholars such as Sherry Velasco and Raymond Stephenson have effectively traced the history of male use of the childbirth metaphor from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* to the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie *Junior*<sup>1</sup>, and Susan Stanford Friedman has compiled feminist criticisms of the trope and examples of female authors' childbirth metaphors. John Tytell, Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, and Lynette Felber, among others, have published studies of artistic couples that discuss Miller and Nin along with other artistic couples such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera and Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Though it is rare, Nin and Miller are not the only pair in history who equally admired and contributed to each other's work but their partnership gives the opportunity to see how fertility metaphors and a sexual and creative partnership interact.

In the context of their experimental creative and sexual partnership, both writers' discussion of fertility and birth, contraception, and abortion take on layered meanings. Juxtaposing the instances in which these topics occur in their work gives insight into the thoughts behind the roles Miller and Nin chose for themselves; in many cases, both authors display a surprising anxiety as they act

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of male fertility imagery and its criticism, see the chapter "Comedy and Control" in Sherry Velasco's *Male Delivery*.

on their opinions about the relationship between procreation and artistic creation.

## CHAPTER 2

### FUSION, FERTILITY, AND FECUNDITY

Although Henry Miller's merry vitriolic style and Anaïs Nin's surreal sensualism bring new life to the childbirth metaphor, it is nothing new for any male or female author to compare creative efforts to childbirth in terms of conceiving and developing ideas, straining to convert ideas into written words, and securing futurity. The English vocabularies for creative products of the mind and for those of the body conveniently overlap—"conceiving an idea," "a fertile mind," "a pregnant phrase"—these are all common expressions that evoke either the unification or separation of mind and body. Having children and creating art really have nothing to do with one another; surely not many women describe childbirth as satisfying their intellectual urges. But perhaps because art and babies can share the word "creation," it is easy to think of the artist role and the mother role as substitutes for one another. In a creative and sexual partnership such as Nin's and Miller's, it is especially tempting for the couple to describe the literature they are creating together as a child.

Many critics, according to Susan Stanford Friedman, have remarked that when authors claim that their creative output is a kind of child, they suggest, perhaps unfairly, that one can either be creative or procreative by implying that creativity is the male version of female procreativity (Friedman 75); women



cannot or should not produce intellectual work since they instead do the bodily work of producing babies. In 1933 Nin writes in her diary complaining of the lack of "fecundity" in her marriage to Hugh Guiler: "We *create* nothing. I should have had children, but I am an artist, not a mother" (*Incest* 116); for her the two paths are mutually exclusive. In her case, she does not directly contrast the abilities of men and women, but her division of "mother" and "artist" shows anxiety about combining the statistically male identity of artist and the female identity of mother. She seems to favor the idea that not giving birth to children is at least a partial factor in the equation that has made men more likely to be authors.

In other cases, the comparison of artistic creation and birth, both in everyday language and in more intentional literary metaphors, characterizes writing as a natural, involuntary bodily action that in Nin's writing is redolent of Helene Cixous's call in her "The Laugh of the Medusa" for women to write "from the body" (Podnieks 314). She anticipated Cixous by defining her writing style as a "new feminine prose" (Felber 35). During her pregnancy she describes working on her book *Winter of Artifice* as strained childbirth: "Writing now shows the pains of childbirth. [...] The straining of nerves, the relation between the body's well-being and output" (*Diary* 315). This passage highlights the unison of mind and body in the physical feelings of frustration that occur in moving internal thoughts onto the physical page.

Friedman notes that when male authors use the procreation metaphor, they tend to "covertly affirm the traditional separation of creativity and procreativity," but that female authors' metaphors aim to "defy those divisions

and [...] unite word and flesh, body and mind" (Friedman 93), which adds another layer of meaning to the metaphor and sometimes suggests that being "bodily" and bearing children is essential to being a woman. Nin seems to use both types of metaphors. During her pregnancy, she describes writing as childbirth metaphorically, but she ends the pregnancy because she believes she cannot be both a writer and a mother.

In addition to her metaphors of books as children, Nin in decades of diary entries consistently refers to her "harem" (*Incest* 116) of men as her "children" who occupy the place of a real child. When discussing her 1934 abortion, she writes, "I have already too many children. There are too many men without hope and faith in the world. Too much work to do, too many to serve and care for" (*Incest* 371). At times, Hugo is her child, because he is sweet and naïve. Miller is her child when he acts selfishly to fulfill his needs. Other artists and lovers throughout her life were her "children" because she supported them financially or influenced their art. Sometimes even she describes herself as a child, when she fears abandonment as she did at the age of eleven when she could not believe that her father had really left her family.

Nin routinely began reaching for words related to fertility to describe her sexual and working partnership with Miller as soon as it was launched. Not only does she use a vocabulary that connects sex and creativity, which is particularly appropriate in a relationship like Nin's and Miller's, but she also treats the two in close proximity on the page. Since they had limited time to meet each other due to Nin's marriage and social schedule, their physical and working relationship

frequently overlapped in the course of a few hours. The word "fusion" often serves the purpose of linking their intellectual and sexual activities, as when she writes in June, 1932, "We read together. We had an amazing fusion. I slept in his arms" (*H&J* 194). A few entries later, she remembers the image of Miller "in an armchair," asking, "Are we going to read Spengler now?" (*H&J* 218), but the next paragraph suggests that their study of Spengler gave way to an afternoon in which "sensuality was exhausted" (*H&J* 218). Later in this entry she describes their relationship as a "profound fusion" (*H&J* 219) in contrast to his passionate yet tormented marriage with his wife, June.

In this same moment, she expresses contentment with "hours so fecund that a lifetime of remembrance could not exhaust them, wear them thin" (*H&J* 219). Here again the idea of fecundity serves a dual purpose: the sexual aspect of her and Miller's relationship is what exalts her and largely what she includes in her diary, which is itself a kind of "lifetime of remembrance," especially since she was still editing and attempting to publish her diaries and fictionalized versions of her relationship with Miller in various forms until the end of her life. Not only the intellectual collaboration with Miller is fecund, but also their sexual relationship invigorates her creativity.

Another moment that exemplifies this cyclical or reciprocal sexual and intellectual creativity is early in her relationship with Miller, when she writes, "I will not rest until I have told of my descent into a sensuality which was as dark, as magnificent, as wild, as my moments of mystic creation have been dazzling, ecstatic, exalted" (*H&J* 83). The "telling" of the sensuality becomes the unprecedented amount of writing Nin was putting into her diary at this time

(which can also be explained in part by the unusual number of secrets she was keeping from her husband, Miller, and various friends and relatives in her "double life"). In the same moment she compares the "sensuality" to artistic creation in a way that characterizes both as instinctive, spiritually driven acts. In short, she compares creation and sexuality at the same time that sex is the main topic of her writing. These two layers describe a more intricate connection for her between her roles of artist, intellectual partner, and sexual partner.

In another instance, in October, 1932, she writes, "Henry has me, mind and womb" (*H&J* 258), a comment that both combines intellectual and sexual activity in a way that subtly characterizes the mind as something fertile and the womb as something intellectual, and separates the two by the nature of listing them separately (but to be realistic, there is no word in English that means both). Miller foreshadows this statement when he says to her a few months earlier, "Your sex permeates your mind" (*H&J* 219); her sensuality is both physical and intellectual. These lines underscore their belief in their "fusion" as something that is necessarily both. The connection between "sex" and "mind" is to them what makes their partnership so rewarding compared to their previous relationships and is parallel to the connection between the life purposes of "man," "woman," and "artist." Also in October 1932, Nin gives another example of overlapping sexual and intellectual partnership: "And here we are, Henry and I, talking in such a way that the end of the afternoon finds us rich, eager to write, to live. When we lie down together, I am in such a frenzy that I cannot wait for our unison" (*H&J* 259). The word "unison" is almost a stronger version of "fusion," that, while here intended with sexual connotations, by proximity characterizes

their desire to "write" and "live" together in a combination of domestic and intellectual interaction.

While serving as comuse and coeditor with Miller, Nin envisioned his and her work as connected by more than just their helping each other. After a particularly successful period of production for both writers during which each lavished praise on the other's writing, Nin writes, "I rejoiced because it seemed Henry had written the male counterpart to my work" (*H&J* 265). Her yin-yang approach might seem unenlightened by today's standards, but in this moment Nin shows that she does not think of her own work as secondary or "other" to Miller's. She is not playing the "wife of a genius" role she joked about in April 1932: "I offered to cook the dinner. 'Let me play at being the wife of a genius.' And I went to the kitchen in my stately rose dress" (*H&J* 125). The joke is that Nin would never actually fill this type of role, because Miller also considers her a genius and because she has a maid and does not do housework in any type of clothes. In a similar moment later in her diary in June of 1932, she comments on his desire to marry her, and in playfully considering what their life would be like, she jokes, "I [would] fall behind in my writing and become the wife of a genius [...] but no housework. I would never marry him. Oh, no" (*H&J* 178).

Miller did for several years hope that he and Nin could marry. Miller biographer Robert Ferguson notes that he had an "Addiction to marital status" (Ferguson 367). This addiction definitely shows through in Miller's dreams of eloping with Nin even after he had already married and divorced twice in failed relationships in which the sexual and intellectual unison did not occur, in his first marriage due to a bad match and dissatisfied submission to middle-class

parental roles, and in his second marriage, in which the roles were much more experimental, due to a breakdown in the relationship while Miller was still "fecundating." According to Nin biographer Noël Riley Fitch, "[Miller and Nin] had come close to marriage several times" (Fitch 169). In October 1932, Nin writes, "He is thinking of our marriage, which I feel would never be, but he is the only man I *would* marry" (*H&J* 255). Fitch believes that in 1939 and in 1945, Nin did consider marriage, but "she would not or could not leave Hugh, her husband and economic support since 1923, and she knew Miller would not make a good (or compliant) husband" (Fitch 169). Indeed, Guiler was not only Nin's economic support but by extension Henry's.

Even though Nin may never have seen Miller's idea of their marriage as viable, Miller, in one famous love letter of August, 1931, goes ahead to describe their relationship as "a marriage" anyway: "Don't expect me to be sane any more. Don't let's be sensible. It was a marriage at Louveciennes—you can't dispute it" (*A Literate Passion* 96). His use of "marriage" as a metaphor for a weekend of sex and writing (he had stayed with Nin at her house in Louveciennes, a suburb of Paris, while Guiler was away) shows that passion and intellectual cooperation are to him what makes a proper unison between men and women.

His repeated marital status might indicate a kind of compulsive, headlong approach to marriage; he wrote this letter very early in their relationship. If he ever wanted a traditional marriage, he never succeeded. Each marriage did seem promising for a while, but when it eventually failed, he quickly moved on to the next relationship; lifelong duration and fidelity were not as important to him as a

physical and intellectual connection<sup>2</sup>. In a letter Nin includes in her diary, Miller says, "Anaïs, you have spoiled me, and now I cannot be satisfied with a marriage based on passion alone. What you have given me I never imagined I could find in a woman. The way we talk and work together, [...] the way we fit together like hand and glove. With you, I have found myself" (*H&J* 259). This "fitting together" for Miller not only created "talk and work," but crystalized his identity as an artist, and Nin says the same of him. Though they never married, theirs may have been the most successful relationship for both of them.

Nin did have a much more practical approach in that her marriage to Guiler had a use for her and allowed her to a secure base from which she could have, as Miller put it, the "rich, varied life [she] desired" (*A Literate Passion* 97). Guiler's humble passivity allowed her a sexual freedom that she guessed she would lose if she married Miller: "[H]e is extremely jealous and would not let me act freely" (*H&J* 178).

With Nin's unwanted pregnancy by Miller in 1934, the metaphors both had used to describe their new type of relationship, words like "fusion," "fertility," and "marriage," became much more real. In the diary entry on May 18, 1934, in which she first mentions her discovery of her first pregnancy, Nin first discusses negative criticism for some of her writing and for Miller's manuscript about D. H. Lawrence (which he didn't publish until the end of his life) and establishes a metaphor for Miller as artist: "an uncreated, unformulated being

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<sup>2</sup> He did try something more traditional with his third wife, Martha Lepski, until she left him and their two children, a reversal of his leaving his first wife and child in Brooklyn decades earlier in one of his biggest steps toward his existential makeover.<sup>2</sup>

who is struggling to be born" (*Incest* 329). Here she sees as "tragic" that Miller is trying to produce something before he is finished developing and goes on to say this "being" is one she has "not yet given birth to." This line feels a bit strange in its attempt to transition to the announcement in the next line that she "carr[ies] in [her] womb the seed of Henry's child." It is in this moment that Nin attempts to connect Miller's and her habitual language of artistic fertility with her literal fertility.

Up until this point, Nin had not considered the prospect of having an actual child, since she thought she was unable to conceive, so here she awkwardly tacks the two types of creation together in an attempt to make her pregnancy with "this little Henry" fit into her already established vision of herself as an artist who "mothers" other artists like Miller into realization. She tries to make sense of the situation by shaping the fetus and Miller-as-artist into symbols of each other.

In this moment she also explores her feelings about the role of mother and its relationship to being a woman. Two years earlier, she had expressed concern that since her breasts were small, she might be more masculine than the average woman or even part adolescent (*H&J* 144)—she thinks, with combined notes of pride and anxiety (because she associates her "masculine" elements with creativity), that she might not be a "complete woman." Here again she brings up the idea of the "complete woman"—this time as a woman who has children. On one hand, her pregnancy makes her feel "pride to be a mother, a woman, a complete woman, the love of a human creation, the infinite possibilities of motherhood" (*Incest* 329). But a few lines later, she writes, "Now, at this critical



moment in my life, I cannot have it. Henry doesn't want it. I can't give Hugh a child of Henry's," she implies that she might consider having a baby in a more traditional setting, but in this experimental arrangement (marriage to Guiler, artistic/sexual partnership with Miller, other lovers), having a baby would be unfitting.

Deirdre Bair, in her 1995 biography of Nin, suggests that Nin chose to believe that Miller was the father even though she was married and had several other lovers at that time (Bair 197). It seems equally likely that Nin could have been certain that Miller was the father, but whether or not she was accurate in her claim that he was, a pregnancy by him would bring the opportunity to view the fetus metaphorically. Either by fact or chosen belief, her marriage to Guiler was not "fecund," while her sexual/creative partnership with Miller was, both metaphorically and literally.

Again combining the literal child, the metaphor of Miller as her child, and the metaphor of creative output as Miller's and her child, Nin adds, "When Henry and I have failed to bring forth works of art, we create a child. It overwhelms me, it ties me to him, it terrifies me. He treats me with awe and tenderness. [...] He remains the child himself who does not wish a rival." She then decides that she will "[kill] the child only out of love for Henry and for Hugh" and that this pregnancy has come when she is "most awake to [her]self as an artist, as a solitary, unmated woman" (*Incest* 329). She oscillates between blaming Henry for her decision and claiming she is making a sacrifice out of love for him.

Before Nin's pregnancy, she thought that she was unable to have children. In June of 1931 she reports, "a Russian doctor told me [pregnancy] could not happen easily; in fact, if I wanted a child I would have to subject myself to an operation. The fear of having a baby, then, was eliminated" (*H&J* 176). Just before her abortion in August 1934, she identifies "introversion of the matrix" (*Incest* 367) as the abnormality that should have prevented conception. Whereas before her pregnancy she may have been able to imagine her writing as the replacement for the children she could not have, when she became pregnant she understood her choice to have an abortion in part as a preservation of her identity as artist.

During her first abortion, the doctor told Nin that she was "too small" to be "built for maternity" (*Incest* 374). Though she was proud of her petite frame, it is difficult to tell from her diary entry how she interpreted this comment (that today sounds like bad science) since she reports it without further comment, but even if she found it insulting or ridiculous, she could certainly use it to support her choice of writing over children, as though destiny had chosen which of these two roles should be hers.

When Nin "stand[s] at a mysterious *carrefour*, hesitant" after the discovery of her pregnancy, she works through the different women's roles she has played in her life and determines that the pregnancy negates them all: "No longer the virgin, the sterile artist woman, the mistress, the diabolical half-human woman—the full bloom of woman" (*Incest* 329). Other than "mistress," all of these roles are independent of other people. Instead of viewing her pregnancy in a way that places her in the typical roles connected to other people (mother, wife), she places emphasis on seeing herself at this time as "a solitary, unmated woman,"

which she links with her role as "an artist." This statement contrasts with her usual vision of her and Miller's "fusion." Her concern that a childless woman is somehow "half human" and that a pregnant woman is in "full bloom" is reminiscent of her earlier fear that she is not a "complete woman."

Next, Nin again makes the claim that she cannot be a mother of a real child, this time using the verb "refuse" (*Incest* 330), because she is the mother of "[her] brother, of the weak, of the poor, of Hugh, of lovers, of [her] father." In this list, she overlaps her choice to be a metaphoric mother with her choice to prevent herself from becoming a literal mother. Interestingly, in her refusal of the "self-immolation" of the role of an actual mother, in which one "gives, protects, serves, surrenders," she cites a metaphor in which she performs these same actions for adult men. Though it is easy to understand how a child would not fit into the life she wanted at that time, that of a writer experimentally layering relationships with multiple, her reasoning is based on metaphor and indicates that she believes some kind of duty of caring for others is essential to herself as a woman. But she feels that as a woman she must fill the role of "mother" in some alternative way that is compatible with her "artist" and "mistress" roles. Though her financial support of Miller and eventually other lovers/artists could be part of the role of "patron" or "benefactor," Nin chooses to name this role "mother" in order to satisfy through metaphor her beliefs about what it means to be a woman.

Nin also claims that the role of artist is not compatible with the role of father. Seeing in Miller a similarity to her musician father who abandoned her family when she was young, she moves on to say, "[Miller] is not a father; he is a

child, he is the artist. He needs all the care, all the warmth, all the faith for himself [...]. He needs to be the only one in the world we created together" (*Incest* 375). In *Sexus*, his friend Stanley remarks, "You were never meant to be a father" (*Sexus* 89), the passive construction of which suggests that fate made the choice, as when Nin relates the doctor's opinion that she is "not made for maternity."

In her next entry, Nin goes on to describe Guiler's reaction to her decision: "Persecution by Hugh, trying to assert his will over mine, trying to force me to keep the child" (*Incest* 331). Though he may have known more than Nin thought he did about her affair with Miller (Bair 163), her marriage to him was the most traditional relationship in her life—though she did not exactly treat it traditionally. Both sought to preserve the marriage, she by elaborate ways of assuring him of her innocence and continued love, and he often by attempting to keep her physically near him and choosing to indulge her and to trust her (Bair 84). Perhaps in this case, he desires to preserve their marriage with the birth of a child, another traditional element of marriage. Nin is too vague in this passage to analyze the exact origins of Hugh's "persecution" in reaction to her decision, but there is no doubt that Guiler's desire for Nin to keep the child (in that it differs from Miller's not wanting it), shows adherence to the traditions of marriage from which Nin and Miller were escaping together in their respective ways.

Shortly after mentioning Guiler's "persecution," a word she also uses in connection with French Catholic doctors, Nin describes the baby as symbolic. In a rare moment in which she acknowledges that she is viewing something real as symbolic, she comments, "The child, being only a symbol, is unnecessary. Something had to flower between us—Henry made it flower" (*Incest* 331).

Another reason for her to abort the child is that it is "only a symbol" that represents the metaphoric fecundity in her partnership with Miller. Perhaps her least convincing reason, instead of making sense of the child through symbolism or metaphor, she directly dismisses the child as merely a symbol.

After finding out that her pregnancy was further along than expected, she considers and rules out raising the child with either Hugh, Henry, or Rank and ends with the proclamation, "I am a mistress" (*Incest* 371), which is the opposite of her statement months earlier that she was "no longer [...] the mistress" due to her pregnancy. Her use of this word is in large part symbolic, since she uses it even though she is in fact married and while she has multiple other lovers. She is in many cases the one supporting her lover financially. Saying "I am a mistress" would usually sound like a woman's stating that she is someone's unwed lover, but in this case Nin uses it as a metaphoric assertion of her imagined and chosen role in romantic/sexual relationships of an unfettered woman artist open to unlimited new relationships. Shortly after this claim, Nin writes, "I want men, not a future extension of myself into a branch" (*Incest* 373). She makes it clear that at this point in her life, her mistress role fuels her artist role. Engaging in adventurous and experimental arrangements with different men is her priority, but she rotates between numerous metaphorical reasons for her abortion in an anxiety that contrasts with her firmness in her choice.

Most of the physical experience of her actual abortion, which was really an induced labor of her six-month "Easter egg"—as she describes it as nonchalantly as Miller would—is preserved in her story "Birth," the title of which, writes Fitch, "suggests that the writer-narrator was born with the death of

her fetus" (Fitch 161). Some of this passage is converted into fiction in *Winter of Artifice*, Nin's gorgeous rendering of the early days of her affair with Miller and her infatuation with his wife, June.

After the abortion, Nin notes that she has "great sadness, regrets." She calls the baby "my first dead creation" (*Incest* 381), again explaining her feelings in terms of the childbirth metaphor. When she evokes the choice of "one kind of motherhood for the sake of a higher one," she underscores her belief that motherhood and creativity are closely related metaphorically but mutually exclusive in reality.

For the first time, in this entry Nin addresses her tendency to view her abortion metaphorically. She writes, "But all my hopes of real, human, simple direct motherhood lying dead. The simple human flowering denied to me because of the dream again, the sacrifice to other forms of creation" (*Incest* 382). In the phrase, "denied to me," Nin's passive construction implies that her fate is to be an artist, not a mother, and with the word "sacrifice" evokes a fateful ritual she is forced to complete. She goes on to write, "Nature arranging my destiny as man's woman, not child's woman. Nature shaping my body for passion alone, for the love of man" (*Incest* 382). Though she may have legitimately believed that her body could not tolerate childbirth, it seems more likely that, though sure of her decision to abort, she is uncomfortable enough to shift the responsibility onto fate. "The dream" stands in for symbolic behavior; she has made real choices based on her dream of being an artist, which for her precludes motherhood.

In the same entry, after her abortion, Nin also rails against the role of father in parallel to her description of the role of mother as "abdication" and "abnegation" (*Incest* 329) months earlier. She writes, citing her own paternal abandonment and also Miller's abandonment of his first wife and child. "I love man as lover and creator. Man as father I do not trust" (*Incest* 382). Interestingly, this implies not only that she saw "father" and "artist" as mutually exclusive, but also that when "woman" and "artist" combine in her, they make "mother," while when "man" and "artist" combine in Miller, they make a "child." She tends to call Miller her child due to his selfish egoism (which she also admired) and her financial and professional support for him. In May of 1934, she writes, "Rank is a father, a lover, and a creator. Henry is a lover, a creator, and a child—not a father, not a husband" (*Incest* 331). In comparison to Otto Rank, her psychoanalyst and lover, Miller does not earn the categorization of "father," most likely because he had abandoned his daughter in the past—his artistic role is also mutually exclusive with parenthood, and the associated social instability does not help. Though Nin does not want to be a literal mother, she still accepts the metaphoric version, but because Miller did not find room in his life (until later) for his child, he cannot be a metaphoric father.

Two paragraphs later, Nin questions her metaphor of Henry as child in a moment when she realizes that she is so entrenched in her metaphoric reasoning that reality and symbol are confused: "Or was the vision of Henry as my child definitely formed and associated with this creation of my flesh and blood?" (*Incest* 382). As in her separation of the roles of mother and artist, she seems to make a knot of fate, symbolism, and the plain facts of a situation, in which the

metaphoric language surrounding sex, books, motherhood, and children overlaps and becomes entangled; here she pauses to consider that she may have played more of a part in the cosmic forces than she has been acknowledging.



## CHAPTER 3

### ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTION

When Nin sees Miller after the abortion, she casually announces her pleasure with the long-awaited publication of *Tropic of Cancer* by saying, "Here is a birth which is of greater interest to me" (*Incest* 383); her casualness contrasts with her gruesome description of the operation and of her insistence that the doctor allow her to see the "black," "completely formed" child that had died in the womb (*Incest* 381). In fact, Nin's playful use of the childbirth metaphor in this instance and Miller's reaction to her abortion are the reverse of what readers of Miller and Nin might expect.

Nin describes Miller as "awed" and "weak." She reports that he was "weeping and trembling" and that he said to her, "You don't know, Anaïs—while you were in the hospital, I couldn't eat and I couldn't sleep. I almost went crazy, I felt your pains in my stomach. I lay in bed and my whole body ached when I thought of you" (*Incest* 383). Unfortunately not much more information exists on Miller's feelings about Nin's abortion, because he did not write about it in order to protect her privacy.

In *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller writes of an incident in which he tries to defend the job of a woman of mixed race who is being fired from the Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company (Western Union) because of her race. After

an emotional thanks from "Valeska," things quickly developed into sexually charged dancing. "It was just the time, as luck would have it, that my wife was getting ready to have another abortion," he mentions. "I was telling Valeska about it as we danced." In the end, Valeska helps Miller's wife pay for the abortion and offers to babysit during the procedure. Miller takes the afternoon off and consummates his affair with Valeska while his wife is at the clinic, and strangely the scene transforms into a reverie about his grandfather, Teddy Roosevelt, and the Brooklyn Navy Yard (*Tropic of Capricorn* 58-59).

Nin herself compares the caddishness of this episode to Miller's actual psychosomatic reaction to her abortion. She even cites his behavior as a reason she cannot have a child with him, before he wrote *Tropic of Capricorn*. This timing indicates that there is some deal of truth in the incident since he apparently had told Nin about it before including a version, fictionalized to whatever extent, in *Tropic of Capricorn*. After her abortion, Nin writes,

Henry who, while his wife was being operated on, was fucking a Negress on the table. His callousness. But the 'monster' had left the Lowenfelses' last night all upset, had looked for me in several cafés, had come home at ten and waited for me, had a headache from worry, and looked quite ravaged. All my feelings about his imagined cruelty vanished. [...] He was terribly anxious about the abortion, terribly tender. (*Incest* 382)

What is notable about Miller's reaction to Nin's abortion, in addition to its softening of his sometimes brutish fictional persona (though it is not uncommon to read of his breaking down and crying in his novels), is that it is strangely

evocative of the concept of "couvade," which Sherry Velasco brings up in her study of male pregnancy in literature. In this practice of early modern Europe, which she categorizes as a kind of "womb envy," "the husband of an expectant wife engages in mimetic childbirth" (Velasco 8), even going so far as to scream in pain. "Couvade" has been interpreted in many different ways, but Velasco suggests it was a way for the father to be more involved in the birth of his child. In any case, Miller's psychosomatic couvade-like pains during Nin's gruesome operation seem to have been real, not feigned, and they at least reveal anxiety about the abortion and the degree of seriousness with which he took his "fusion" with Nin; physical reality and his metaphor for creativity overlap when he experiences real bodily pain parallel to hers.

Nin's own attitude toward the abortion turns up on a different note a few months later. In November, 1934, she compares her own abortion to her maid, Emilia's "short abortion of two hours, which I would not have exchanged for my own superb adventure" (*Incest* 403). In this passage, Nin's abortion seems to have become, like her literary and sexual relationship with Miller, part of her "artist" and "mistress" roles that fueled her creative energies.

Though Miller could not write about his affair with Nin for the sake of her preservation of her double life, with a lot of Nin's help, Miller established himself as artist in *Tropic of Cancer*, his novel about his peregrination in Paris before meeting Nin that aimed to do away with the subtlety about sex and other facts of life common to the style of the time that Miller often wrote off as "too literary." Taking the lead from Frank Harris, James Joyce, and other writers of famously

banned books, Miller includes in *Tropic of Cancer* several passages that casually drop abortion or birth control, always through free indirect speech.

The way Miller mentions abortions and birth control (usually "post-coital douching," one of the most popular methods at the time according to Andrea Tone) in the same way as any common daily occurrence is unusual for literature of the time. Early in *Tropic of Cancer*, for example, Miller depicts the casually forlorn attitude Boris's girlfriend Elsa has about her succession of failed relationships: "Everywhere a man, and then she has to leave, and then there's an abortion and then a new job and then another man and nobody gives a fuck except to use her (*Cancer* 25). Most writers of this era dealing with abortion and birth control made them centripetal to their plots either to attempt to gain support for women's reproductive rights ("Saved" 32) or to depict them as dangerous threats to tradition (Balay 472-473). In Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (which Miller loved), for instance, the plot hinges on the young unmarried couple's unwanted pregnancy in an argument that the inaccessibility of family planning leads to much worse (*Textual Contraception* 63-65). On the opposite side of the debate, Kathleen Norris pitted birth control against a nostalgic, "idealized femininity" in a denunciation of the evolution of women's roles (Balay 473). Typically these concepts were part of morality plots—a woman would be rewarded or punished for her choices. In some cases, after an abortion a woman's other self would be symbolically reborn or preserved.

Part of what is unusual about Nin's and Miller's treatment of abortion, then, is that they never used them as a motive in a plot or attempted advancement of a cause. Perhaps this anomaly is not surprising in two writers

who were not interested in current events or politics. And while for Nin at least, the first abortion recorded in the *Incest* volume of the diary and in her story "Birth" as well as Miller's examples in *Tropic of Cancer*, the abortions and birth control methods discussed are taking place in Paris during the interwar heyday of bohemianism (which Nin and Miller took advantage of and simultaneously rejected) and surge of acceptance of female sexual autonomy.

In her book, *Abortion and the Individual Talent*, Christina Hauk makes several observations about abortion and birth control as it appears in modernist writing before she reads through *The Waste Land* in search of evidence of Eliot's "encod[ing] of abortion as a practice inimical to and irrecoverable by patriarchal hegemony" (Hauk 235). Suzette Henke's "A Confessional Narrative: Maternal Anxiety and Daughter Loss in Anaïs Nin's *Journal of Love: Incest*" argues against Nin biographer Bair's belief that Nin's pursuing an alternative abortion from a "sage femme" indicates hesitancy about having an abortion by confirming that "medical abortion in France was certainly illegal and almost inaccessible" (Henke 77) in France until much later in history, though it was slightly more accessible in England. Hauk, though, mentions that the "threat of legal persecution" in England in the modernist era was strong enough to keep the topic "somewhat taboo" and "private" even into the mid-1930s when Nin sought an abortion.

Hauk suggests that many major modernists (especially Eliot) reacted against the birth control movement and the choice of abortion, however legal, with writing that "returns maternity as a stable social and discursive site beyond human/male control" and "privileges male creativity as the key cultural site" (Hauk 235). The juxtaposition of the "priveleg[ing] of male creativity" and

anxiety about the waning of "maternity" suggest a fear that if women are able to avoid maternity they may invade the male creative territory, an attitude that echoes the creativity/procreativity mutual exclusivity in Nin's writing.

Hauk's observations make Miller's and Nin's attitudes toward the sensitive topics of birth control, abortion, and female creativity (and their willingness to nonchalantly mention as well as to seriously discuss and reflect on all three) seem unusually bold for their time. Sometimes their readers may even forget that taboos about sexuality and reproduction existed at the time, just as it seems almost impossible that many scenes in Miller's New York novels take place during Prohibition, which comes off as practically nonexistent except in a few instances when a small remark or detail reminds the reader that alcohol was supposed to be illegal.

But Miller's other works take place in New York when, at least publicly, abortion, and to a lesser extent, contraception, were taboo if not underground. But both Nin and Miller write about them as though they were easily accessible, almost undermining the usual perception of this era. Hauk mentions that advocates for birth control in the early part of the twentieth century believed "birth control would fundamentally alter the relationship between men and women, making mutual sexual pleasure and its attendant intimacy the cornerstone of marriage" (Hauk 229). It is typical of early public arguments in favor of birth control to be carefully situated within traditional marriage ("Saved" 31).

Many female writers of this era challenged "sentimental views of marriage and motherhood" (*Textual Contraception* 101), rejecting the idea that a woman had

a primary or essential purpose in life to act the roles of wife and mother which led to romanticized fulfillment. While Nin was caught up on sentimental, or at least archetypal motherhood, she certainly viewed her abortion as a preservation of her "other self" who was the "artist" and "mistress." One of Miller's primary goals as a writer was to challenge sentimental views of any prescribed role, including those of husband, wife, father, and mother. As mentioned earlier, he did have a penchant for marriage, but, as his biographer, Robert Ferguson phrases it, "Miller had rejected every aspect of the role developed by society for the male--as worker, provider and head of the family--and with an almost frantic consistency urged his readers likewise to reject their socio-sexual destinies" (Ferguson 363). In addition to this rejection of male roles, he rejected sacralized images of women as self-sacrificing wives and mothers. In *Sexus*, he even laments that what is considered "truly feminine" is an expected "masquerade" that "thwart[s]" women (*Sexus* 345). Though the opinion that abortion and birth control is necessary to the alteration of prescribed roles for men and women is not synonymous with feminism, and indeed, Miller's caddish fictional persona sometimes undermines his good intentions, Miller's eroticized and frank depictions of douching are quite liberating compared to the shameful and secretive attitude often expected of real and fictional women, but his experiences with abortion and abortionists reveal a moral anxiety that is subservient to his belief in sexual freedom for both men and women as an affirmation of human instincts.

In *Tropic of Cancer*, most of the passages that mention birth control are in comically outré scenes in which the douche bag almost becomes a symbol for the

womanizing of Van Norden, the caricature of columnist Wambly Bald whom Miller found repellant: "Over the bedstead hangs a douche bag which he keeps for emergencies—for the *virgins* whom he tracks down like a sleuth" (*Cancer* 106); "The *garçon* is watching him with a puzzled air; he has a valise in one hand and the douche bag in the other" (*Cancer* 132). In one passage the underground quality of transactions involving abortions and birth control comes through:

[Fillmore has] bought [Macha] a douche bag [...] and other little things which were recommended to him by a Hungarian doctor, a little quack of an abortionist [...]. It seems his boss had knocked up a sixteen-year-old girl once and she had introduced him to the Hungarian; and then after that the boss had a beautiful chancre and it was the Hungarian again. That's how one gets acquainted in Paris—genito-urinary friendships. (*Cancer* 239)

As exemplified in this passage, discussion about abortion and birth control in *Tropic of Cancer* never directly involves Miller; he always relates the details of someone else's experience. In including these fictionalized conversations, he expresses both his comfort and surprise with the bohemian attitudes he encountered in Paris. With free indirect speech, he appropriates the freer attitude of the Parisians into his prose, but he still keeps himself at a distance while passing on his shock and discomfort to his readers. In this early novel, Miller's free indirect speech could also work to protect him legally; he can incorporate abortion and contraception into his stylized first-person narrative but attribute any illegal actions to others.



In books written after *Tropic of Cancer*, such as *Tropic of Capricorn* and *Sexus*, however, Miller includes more personal scenes involving abortion and birth control. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, his wife obtains an abortion with little difficulty. In *Sexus*, there are numerous scenes that include "post-coital douching," though disappointingly not metaphorically. Often these scenes are all at once comic, erotic, and infused with pregnancy paranoia either on his part or on the woman's.

Midway through *Sexus*, Miller gives a scene in which his first wife, "Maude" (Beatrice Wickens) wants "to take a douche immediately always fearful of getting caught." While he is administering the douche, he laughs at the comic pose she gets herself into and also comments on how it arouses him, and she says "Please don't fool now" in a tone that he characterizes as sounding "as if the delay of a few seconds might mean an abortion" (*Sexus* 238-239). Although in this scene it is Maude who is fearful, in the next scene he is the one anxious about anyone's "getting caught:"

Then suddenly I thought of the douche. 'Get up! Get up!' I said, nudging her roughly.

'I don't need to,' she said weakly, giving me a knowing smile.

'You mean...?' I looked at her in astonishment.

'Yes, there's no need to worry .... Are you all right? Don't you want to wash?'

In the bathroom she confessed that she had been to the doctor—another doctor. There would be nothing to fear any more.

'So that's it?' I whistled. [...]

'Oh God,' she said, flinging her arms around me, 'if only ...'

'If only what?'

'You know what I mean ...'

I unglued myself and turning my head away, I said: 'Yes, I guess I do.' [...] (*Sexus* 377-378)

The implication at the end of the passage is that if Maude had not has to worry about pregnancy throughout their marriage, it may have lasted and may have been more satisfying, giving Maude the ability to change her attitude about sex and freeing both inchoate artists (Miller's first wife was an able pianist) from the roles of respectable middle-class parents.

A few pages later after a romp with Maude and Elsie, Maude's friend, he again shows the most fear of pregnancy:

"'You'd better go take a douche,' said Maude.

'I guess so,' Elsie sighed. 'I don't seem to give a damn. If I'm caught I'm caught.'

'Go on in there, Elsie,' I said. 'Don't be a damned fool' [...]'" (*Sexus* 385).

This passage in particular strikes a contrast between Miller's usual "flow of life" philosophy and his paranoia about pregnancy. Elsie's "If I'm caught I'm caught" sounds more like the submission to instinct and destiny that Miller believed in. In these scenes, Miller shows his usual acceptance and even celebration of sex and birth control as necessary parts of life at the same time that he fights against pregnancy and reproduction, which are also natural and instinctive parts of life.

In *Sexus*, there is also a handful of scenes involving an abortionist around the time when he and Mona (his second wife, June Miller) live for a stint in

"Cockroach Hall" in the Bronx in the spare room of the home office of "Dr. Onirifick," who was "always very busy." Miller tells with grotesque humor that "children's diseases were his specialty, but the only children we ever noticed during our stay were the embryonic ones which he chopped into fine pieces and threw down the drains" (*Sexus* 155). His tone here somehow unites indifference and dismay, and the passage indirectly evokes the illegal, underground nature of Dr. Onirifick's business, since it has to be disguised a pediatric office.

A few scenes later, Miller includes a memorable monologue from Dr. Onirifick's elderly father, who sits in a brightly lit room near some drying laundry:

'He works in darkness up there. He is too proud. He works for the devil. It is better here with the wet clothes. [...] He is a butcher. He gives his mind to death. This is the greatest darkness of the human mind—killing what is struggling to be born. Even animals one should not kill, except in sacrifice. My son knows everything—but he doesn't know that murder is the greatest sin. There is light here ... great light ...' (*Sexus* 191).

Miller's sympathy in this scene (in which the phrase "struggling to be born" shares Nin's exact wording from the diary entry in 1934 describing Henry's premature art) lies mostly with the dignified old man, though in the next page the old man goes on until he seems a bit cracked. Miller notes that the "great light" is actually "yellow, artificial light which man had invented" (*Sexus* 193) perhaps in an attempt to cut through the religious elements of the old man's

speech and to rationalize the necessity of abortion by making the world seem controlled by humans instead of by something divine.

At the time he was writing *Sexus*, the women he had been involved with in his life had collectively gone through at least four abortions. In scenes like this, Miller does partially aim to shock, but he also reveals a conflict between his view that abortion is a necessity that should be accessible and his underlying feeling that there is something sordid about it. In all these scenes in which Miller treats abortion as though it is no big deal, he does so because he knows it is a big deal to a lot of people. In a way he wants to shock, but in doing so he acknowledges that what he is saying is, in fact, shocking, or at least upsetting for him.

Even in Nin's and Miller's unshakeable choice of childlessness in their relationship, her overcompensation with reasoning and symbolism and his grotesque anxious language betray that anxiety and confusion that abortion . His casual inclusion of abortion as though to argue it is just something that happens in life attempts to cast it in with his "flow of life" philosophy, but he has difficulty reconciling the literal termination of life with the metaphoric "life force" affirmed by the enjoyment of sex, food, and conversation. His scenes of post-coital douching fit much better into his usual schema, because he eroticizes them and is able describe the "flow" of semen and water in a way that connects it with his vocabulary of life.

Miller also has a tendency to use the word "abortion" and also the word "miscarriage" metaphorically. Later in his career, he typically used "abortions" to describe his first attempts at writing that were in a way practice for his first full-

term "pregnancy," such as his first attempt at a book, *Clipped Wings*, which he abandoned and made fun of in his later works.

In *Tropic of Capricorn*, he describes the relationship that never flourished with his limerent object of his teenage years, "Una," as an "aborted affair." He pins the tragedy of this "masochistic" crush on his lack of confidence that prevented him from making his feelings for her plain; it was easier for him to "punish" himself by hesitating to say anything, lamenting over her engagement and marriage.

In a brief scene in *Sexus*, Miller depicts himself in a moment of inspiration writing a letter to his biggest living influence at the time, Knut Hamsun, traces of whose *Hunger* appear in *Tropic of Cancer*. The reply was what Miller found to be a jumbled appeal for help gaining American readership, the disapproval of which is somewhat ironic considering that Miller never had any scruples about begging for money and support in letters, pamphlets, and even longer works such as *Big Sur* and *the Oranges of Hieronymous Bosch*. When Miller reads the letter from Hamsun he writes that "some terrible miscarriage had occurred" (*Sexus* 369). While Miller had been "fecundated" by his idol, this letter did not forge the connection Miller may have expected between the two writers.

Later in *Sexus*, Miller returns home to the squalid basement apartment in which he lives with his wife "Mona" (June Miller), and her friend and possible lover, "Stasia." He overhears the women's conversation from the street, including what is either a confession or a lie from June that she never loved him and considered him "just a child." Miller describes his feelings in this moment as menstruation: "Then a curious physiological comedy took place. *I began to*

*menstruate*. I menstruated from every hole in my body" (*Sexus* 498). Paul R. Jackson interprets this "surrealistic menstruating" as "the temporary transformation of the bruised husband into the strong, if comic aggressor." The menstruation, Jackson explains, suggests "the promise of fertility" for a writer "coming to the profession for the first time with real seriousness" (Jackson 45). While Jackson's interpretation makes sense, there is opportunity for a different interpretation that accounts for the profoundly sad atmosphere of this scene. Miller thought of June's artistic bohemianism as pulling him out of the rut of his earlier marriage; her faith in him and willingness to support him financially was his "buoy" ("How I Cut Loose"). To hear her say she never loved him and thought of him as a child pulled the rug out from under his feet. But the menstruation could instead emphasize not that he is fertile but that he is not pregnant, especially since he wrote *Sexus* at the end of his relationship with Nin, with whom he became "pregnant" and delivered his first real book, *Tropic of Cancer*.

In both of these cases, "abortion," "miscarriage," and "menstruation" carry sad connotations of something deeply desired but lost and connotations of either fate's intervention in something Miller was trying to accomplish, or a human intervention in something fate was trying to accomplish.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Perhaps what really occurs when Nin and Miller layer metaphor and reality is an endeavor to understand what they control in their lives and what they do not. The symbols of Nin's not being "made for maternity" and Miller's pregnancy with *Tropic of Cancer* align the body with a destiny that is out of one's control. Their attempts to merge intellectual work with the body (sexuality, pregnancy) characterize their writing as involuntary or fated. Their firm belief in their "fusion" (and it must be admitted that it is an extraordinary coincidence that they found each other) also favors the idea of a surrender to collaboration as letting go of even more control over one's creativity.

When Nin mixes symbolism into her decision to have an abortion, she implies that something greater than herself has chosen for her the life of a childless artist. In fulfilling her destiny to become an artist and to help others do so, she is intended to "sacrifice," as she says, her child. Finding symbolism and patterns in one's life, a practice that makes up most of Nin's and Miller's works, is in a way an attribution to divine design of one's own decisions. Abortion strikes an especial conflict because it epitomizes the line between choice and destiny: one's own mental, rational choice interacts with the involuntary functions of the body in a way that affects three lives. This conflict is why the overlap of metaphoric creative fertility (inspired by a sexual partner) and literal

abortion are so intriguing in Nin's record of the first years of her and Miller's experimental partnership, especially in light of the anxiety about abortion that appears subtly in Miller's work.

Both Nin and Miller became more comfortable with their choices later in their lives. Miller eventually raised two children and reconnected with his daughter from his first marriage. Nin purposefully remained childless, but her reasoning for the choice of abortion became much more confident and succinct by 1940, when she wrote, "Motherhood is a vocation like any other. It should be freely chosen not imposed on women" ("Mirage"). The struggle in the early phase of their relationship to define what they chose and what washed up in "the great stream of life" (*Sexus* 127) matured their artistic visions, and it gives readers insight into how metaphor and reality interact in one of the best examples of a partnership that merged creativity and sexuality.

I have chosen to write about this aspect of Nin's and Miller's work because, as a young woman who has added hours and hours of joy to my life not only through reading Miller but also through putting into practice some of his ideas, I feel compelled to reconcile for myself my absolute adoration of Miller and the bad reputation he has in many circles. I do not feel that it is my business to change anyone's opinion of Miller, but I want to understand how it is possible both to be a feminist and to love Miller, since that is something I do every day. Immediately I know the simple answer: the personal liberation he exemplified in the rejection of the prescribed roles, including the specifically male roles of father, husband, and breadwinner is totally available to women, who just have



different roles to shed and different sacrifices to make. As a male, he gave his personal example, but he admired any individual, male or female, who truly cut his or her own trail. This admiration is exemplified in his serious treatment of Nin's work as better than his own, so I have always wanted to look closer into their relationship. What I ended up focusing on is not what I originally expected to find. I hope this thesis at least presents some new ideas about how Nin and Miller perceived the interaction between her pregnancy and abortion and their identities as artists.

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